*The Poisonwood Bible* Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Barbara Kingsolver Period 1A 2A 1B 3B

Group # \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Group Discussion: A Political Allegory

In an online interview, Barbara Kingsolver answered **the following question**:

The evangelist Nathan Price never speaks for himself in this tale, we only see him through the eyes of his wife and daughters. Why did you not give Nathan a voice?

**Her answer:**

“Because of what the story is about. Some people seem to think this is a male/female issue, but that never even crossed my mind. Nathan obviously doesn't represent maleness! He represents an historical attitude. This book is a political allegory, in which the small incidents of characters' lives shed light on larger events in our world. The Prices carry into Africa a whole collection of beliefs about religion, technology, health, politics, and agriculture, just as industrialized nations have often carried these beliefs into the developing world in an extremely arrogant way, very certain of being right (even to the point of destroying local ideas, religion and leadership), even when it turns out-as it does in this novel-that those attitudes are useless, offensive or inapplicable. I knew most of my readers would feel unsympathetic to that arrogance. We didn't make the awful decisions our government imposed on Africa. We didn't call for the assassination of Lumumba; we hardly even knew about it. We just inherited these decisions, and now have to reconcile them with our sense of who we are. We're the captive witnesses, just like the wife and daughters of Nathan Price. Male or female, we are not like him. That is what I wanted to write about. We got pulled into this mess but we don't identify with that arrogant voice. It's not his story. It's ours”.

1. ALLEGORICAL EVENTS

If this book is a political allegory in which the small incidents of characters’ lives shed light on larger events in our world, identify and discuss FIVE “small incidents” from the lives of these characters that “shed light” (explore, represent, explain) larger events of the novel.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Identify the incident from the novel: | What might it represent allegorically (symbolically)? |
| 1. |  |
| 2. |  |
| 3. |  |
| 4. |  |
| 5. |  |

1. ALLEGORICAL CHARACTERS

Kingsolver says that we have inherited any arrogance or awful decisions our government imposed on Africa, that we’re the captive witnesses, just like the wife and daughters of Nathan Price. Discuss these women and girls. Try to characterize how each character transforms or reacts to all that happened to them in the Congo, to being a captive witness. Then discuss and record how each may represent one way of coping with the less-honorable parts of the history you inherit because of your government’s decisions, past and present.

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| **CHARACTER:** | **HER REACTIONS/ CHANGES/ WAYS OF COPING:** | **ALLEGORICAL MEANING** (how does the character represent how others—even groups of people—react to the ugly parts of the collective past we inherit?) |
| **Orleanna** |  |  |
| **Rachel** |  |  |
| **Leah** |  |  |
| **Adah** |  |  |
| **Ruth May**  NOTE: the “voice in the trees” in the last chapter IS Ruth May—go back through the book and look for the clues along the way if you’re doubtful . . . |  |  |

NOW: working **individually**, write a response identifying which of these “captive witnesses” **best captures how you fee**l as an American (or as a Utahn, a [insert your religion here], a teenager, an OHS student, etc.) who must inherit some of the dishonorable and arrogant issues of our collective past.

Explain why you chose this person. Justify why this person is a better example (or just an easier fit) than the other characters. Is it the one you TRULY are like or the one you WANT to be like? If this is truly who you want to be, what do you do (or need to do)? If not, can you live with the difference?